

VZCZCXRO4731
PP RUEHPB
DE RUEHLM #1060/01 3270850
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 230850Z NOV 09 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0818
INFO RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN 0021
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 3981
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1020
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RUEHHI/AMEMBASSY HANOI 0005
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RUEHML/AMEMBASSY MANILA 1592
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3508
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001060

SIPDIS

STATE FOR IO/MPR/EA, IO/GS, AND INL/C

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [APER](#) [AORC](#) [ECON](#) [KUNR](#) [UN](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: COLOMBO PLAN NOVEMBER SESSION READOUT: USA TAKES PRESIDENCY

REF: COLOMBO 631

COLOMBO 00001060 001.2 OF 002

¶1. SUMMARY: At the 266th session of the Colombo Plan Council held November 19, the United States took over the one-year rotating Presidency held most recently by Thailand. The minutes from the 265th session were adopted and council members focused on the upcoming 42nd Consultative Committee Meeting (CCM) which India will host February 10-11, 2010. The Colombo Plan Staff College (CPSC) presented its 2007/8 and 2008/9 annual reports to the Council. END SUMMARY.

¶2. In comparison with recent meetings, the 266th session ran smoothly with very few interventions (reftel). Minutes from the previous session were adopted without discussion and included an amendment, previously circulated, from the Philippines. The draft agenda for February's CCM in India did raise a number of questions. Colombo Plan Secretary General Patricia Yoon-Moi Chia responded to a question from the Philippine representative regarding the role of the Council President at the CCM. Chia noted that the host country will nominate a Chairman and Secretary General from India to run the CCM and indicated that the Council President will not have an unduly burdensome role to play. Bangladesh questioned the role of observers, to which Chia responded that at the last CCM, UNICEF, UNESCO, and UNDP gave an overview of their regional cooperation programs. Observer countries, however, do not traditionally make statements.

¶3. Director General Shyamal Majumdar from the CPSC then gave a brief presentation on the annual reports for the college. He emphasized growth -- 64 programs benefitting 2468 trainees in the past year -- a 118 percent increase. The CPSC is also

developing a number of online courses and partnering with UN agencies to broaden the number of people reachable throughout the Colombo Plan region. He also requested that the CPSC be included as an agenda item at the CCM. Following the DG's presentation the annual reports were accepted and submitted.

¶4. Thereafter, Thai Ambassador and outgoing Council President Kanasuta called the election for the presidency. As expected, High Commissioner Gilani of Pakistan nominated U.S. Ambassador Butenis. Kanasuta made some brief comments of thanks before turning the chair over to Ambassador Butenis. The Ambassador noted the cooperative regional development aspects of the Colombo Plan and urged the Secretariat to examine opportunities to provide additional assistance to the Maldives. The Ambassador then listed the countries who will participate in the new Standing Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters for FY 2009/10. Those include the U.S., Thailand, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Indonesia. Australia is also expected to participate, but its representative is awaiting final instructions from Canberra.

¶5. Before concluding the meeting, the Japanese representative questioned the cost of the newly occupied Colombo Plan building (located at 31 Wirerama Road, Colombo 7). The SecGen explained that the approved budget for the office space was 600,000 Sri Lanka Rupees (SLR) a month. The lease agreement is for 500,000 SLR a month, and the government of Sri Lanka has agreed to pay for 50 percent of this cost, so the Colombo Plan is actually paying less for rent now than in the old office space. The rent will not go up for five years.

¶6. The Minutes of the 265th session and the draft agenda for
COLOMBO 00001060 002.2 OF 002

the CCM have been forwarded via email to Greg Stanton and Thom Browne in INL, and Tony Hendon and Lisa Spratt in IO. The 267th session of the Colombo Plan Council is scheduled for January 20, 2010.

¶7. BACKGROUND: The Colombo Plan is a regional cooperation organization established in 1951. Member countries include Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Burma, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, the U.S.A. and Vietnam. The four permanent programs focus on public administration and environment, private sector development, long-term fellowship opportunities, and the drug advisory program. The Colombo Plan promotes economic and social development, technical cooperation, information sharing and capacity building, and technology transfer among the member countries. Please contact EconOff Ken Kero-Mentz with any questions.
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